

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 17186 241744Z

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FOLLOWING TEL BOMBAY 3205 DTD 22 DEC 75 RCVD NEW DELHI
BEING REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: NA

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SUBJECT: CONGRESS VICTORY IN GUJARAT PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS

REF: BOMBAY 3183

1. FINAL RESULTS IN THE GUJARAT RURAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS GIVE CONGRESS (R) AN IMPRESSIVE WIN AS IT TOOK 13 OF THE 18 DISTRICT PANCHAYATS AND 117 OF THE 182 TALUKA PACHAYATS. PERCENTAGE-WISE, CONGRESS CAPTURED 57.1 PERCENT OF THE DISTRICT PANCHAYAT SEATS, AND 51.4 PERCENT OF THE TALUKA PANCHAYAT SEATS. BREAKDOWN IN SEATS IS GIVEN BELOW IN PARAGRAPH 8.

B2. THE SWING IN FAVOR OF CONGRESS (R) COULD HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE PRO-KULAK POLICIES OF THE FRONT GOVERNMENT WHICH HAD EXEMPTED THE LARGE FARMERS FROM THE FOODGRAIN LEVY. THE APPOINTMENT OF KMLP LEADER VALLABHXZAI PATEL TO MAKE A DETAILED STUDY OF THE LAND REFORM AND RELATED AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS, DONE TO SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF THE KULAKS, REPORTEDLY UPSET THE RURAL POOR, THE UNTOUCHABLES AND THE TRIBALS. CONGRESS (R) MOVED TO EXPLOIT THIS UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENT WHICH FOLLOWED THE FRONT'S
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 17186 241744Z

FAILURE TO COME UP WITH A PROGRAM FOR THE RURAL AREAS WHICH HAVE

SUFFERED SO BADLY IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS. FRONT IS PLAYING UP FAILURE OF CENTRE TO SUPPLY ADEQUATE FUNDS FOR RURAL AREAS AS MAJOR REASON FOR UNHAPPINESS WITH STATE GOV'T, BUT EVIDENCE NOT FULLY SUPPORTIVE OF THIS THESIS.

3. ADDITIONALLY, WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE FACT THAT MRS GANDHI'S TWENTY-POINT PROGRAM MAY HAVE HAD SOME APPEAL TO THE GUJARATI RURAL ELECTORATE, AS CONGRESS (R) HAS BEEN SELLING THE PROGRAM AS A SORT OF "NEW DEAL" FTJ THE RURAL POOR. THE SPLIT IN THE SARVODAYA MOVEMENT CAUSED BY ACHARYA BHAVE'S REFUSAL TO SUPPORT THE J.P. MOVEMENT WAS EXPLOITED BY THE GUJARAT CONGRESS ORGANIZATION, WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF SARVODAYA WORKERS ENGAGED IN WORKING WITH THE TRIBALS REPORTEDLY ACTIVELY SUPPORTING CONGRESS (R). THIS COULD HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE TRIBAL BELT OF BULSAR, SURAT, BROACH AND BARODA DISTRICTS.

4. THE UNITY AND COHESIVENESS OF THE FRONT IN THE URBAN AREAS WAS CONSPICUOUSLY MISSING IN THE RURAL AREAS. AS A RESULT, FRONT SUPPORTERS CONTESTED THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS IN MANY CONSTITUENCIES ON THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTY SYMBOLS (WHICH THEY HAD AVOIDED IN RAJKOT, SURAT, AND BARODA). FOR THE REASONS CITED IN PARA 2, KMLP WAS MORE A LIABILITY THAN AN ASSET, AS IT TOO APPEARED TO BE LACKING IN ORGANIZATION AND IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT (MANY KMLP SUPPORTERS, WE HEAR, CONTESTED THE ELECTIONS AS INDEPENDENTS).

5. THE UNEXPECTED PERFORMANCE OF CONGRESS (R), WHICH CLOSED ITS RANKS BEHIND HITENDRA DESAI IN AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO REVERSE THE DEFEATS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELCTIONS, HAS APPARENTLY IMPROVED DESAI'S STANDING IN THE PARTY, AND WE HEAR THAT HE HAS BEEN INVITED TO ATTEND THE ALL INDIA WORKING COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN RECOGNITION OF HIS ROLE IN THE PARTY'S WIN.

6. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS BADLY HIT THE KMLP. THE LOCAL EDITION OF THE INDIAN EXPRESS ON DEC 22 INDICATES THAT "A CRACK APPEARED TO BE DEVELOPING" IN KMLP AS A RESULT OF THE FRONT'S DEFEAT IN THE ELECTIONS. THE PARTY MIGHT WELL BEGIN TO COME APART AS CHIMANBHAI PATEL'S OWN POSITION HAS BEEN FURTHER WEAKENED AND HE IS LESS ABLE TO OPPOSE DEFECTIONS TO THE CONGRESS THAT ARE BOUND TO LOOM AFTER THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CONVENES.

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 17186 241744Z

SINCE THE FRONT ENJOYS THE SUPPORT OF ALL 13 KMLP MEMBERS, DEFECTIONS COULD WEAKEN THE FRONT'S HOLD ON POWER IN THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

7. THE CONGRESS WOULD SEEM TO CONFIRM MRS GANDHI'S HOLD ON THE RURAL ELECTORATE, EVEN IN A STATE LIKE GUJARAT. AS THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL SAID IN ITS EDITORIAL DEC 20, THE ELECTIONS ONLY "PROVE THAT THE CONGRESS HAS NOT LOST ITS TRADITIONAL BASE IN THE RURAL

AREAS EVEN IN 'PROBLEM STATES' LIKE GUJARAT WHILE IT MIGHT HAVE ALIENATED SECTIONS OF VOCAL MIDDLE CLASS VOTERS IN THE URBAN CENTERS." THE EDITORIAL GOES ON TO POINT OUT THAT "THE OUTCOME OF THE PANCHAYAT POLLS ALSO PROVES THAT THE CONGRESS (O) AND ITS PARTNERS IN THE JF CANNOT HOPE TO EXPLOIT THE GUJARAT EXPERIMENT TO BUILD A 'GRAND ALLIANCE' CAPABLE OF CHALLENGING THE CONGRESS ON A NATIONAL SCALE."

WE DO NOT TAKE ISSUE WITH THESE OBSERVATIONS.

8. A BREAKDOWN IN THE SEATS IS AS FOLLOWS:

ZILLA PANCHAYATS/PANCHAYAT SAMITIS

TOTAL SEATS	670/3,942
CONGRESS	383/2,027
FRONT	209/1,179
INDEPENDENTS	78/ 736

9. POLLING FOR THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE JAN 3, 1976, WHEN 1,400 VILLAGE HEADMEN WILL ELECT 1,320 MEMBERS OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITIS. CONSIDERING THE TREND SO FAR, EXPECT CONGRESS EXPECTS TO WIN A MAJORITY OF THOSE SEATS. COURTNEY

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